

## **The 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Founding of Israel**

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If ever there were a people who deserve to be bitter, based on how it has been treated, it is the Jewish people.

If ever there were a people who have the right to feel that the world owed it compensation and grace, by any measure of objectivity, it is the Jews.

If ever there was a country entitled to some modicum of sympathy and understanding, it is the Jewish nation.

If ever there were a country that is justified for defending itself against attempts at its destruction, and that should not be subject to constant criticism for doing so, it is the state of Israel.

And if ever a country deserves appreciation and gratitude for what it has contributed to the world, it is Israel.

After 2,000 years of persecution, wandering, victimization and subjugation in both Christian and Moslem nations across the globe; after centuries of outright hostility, animosity, resentment, discrimination, exclusion and isolation; after the culmination of a pathological hatred resulting in the slaughter of six million innocents, at the rate of thousands a day, across the European continent, over an extended period of several years, as people watched and did nothing to stop the mass murder; after all this --- the modern nation of Israel was established in May of 1948.

As a people picked itself up from the ashes of the Holocaust and 2,000 years of abuse during its exile and set out to create a homeland and haven for its dispersed, one would assume and hope that the world would extend some kind of protection and immunity from further attacks and assaults.

Picture how a fragile, delicate bird which has been attacked is cared for, nourished, and nurtured so it can be nursed back to health, or what we do to protect an endangered species whose numbers are depleted. Yet instead of being protected, Israel has been under siege every day since its founding.

In 1948, hours after people danced in the streets to celebrate the miraculous fulfillment of a 2,000 year old dream, with a population of a mere 650,000 people Israel was attacked by the surrounding Arab states. With a population of approximately 40 million, they assumed victory would be easy. Yet somehow, with its underfunded, inadequately supplied, and not properly trained or prepared for battle army, the Holocaust survivors and refugees from Arab lands, people who had never before held guns, had an army or waged war did the miraculous and succeeded in defending themselves and pushed back those who sought to wipe them out and drive them into the sea.

For the next 60 years, unwilling to accept the reality of that defeat, the Arab nations have tried every way possible to reverse the outcome of the 1948 war.

On the battlefield, they amassed armies and tried on numerous occasions to do what they did not succeed in doing 60 years ago. When that tactic did not succeed, Israel's enemies turned to guerilla warfare, and the dispatching of terrorists and suicide bombers to kill civilians. In addition to the violent approach, they have attacked Israel in the court of world opinion and attempted to isolate, ostracize, demonize and thus delegitimize Israel. They have attempted to defeat Israel economically by imposing a boycott, not just on its products, but on any company or nation that trades with Israel. They have extended this boycott by attempting to prohibit Israeli academics from teaching or speaking at European universities. They have attempted to fight Israel on the cultural front. They have turned international conferences into stages for spewing their anti Semitic rantings. In short, their xenophobia has caused them to use every means at their disposal to overturn the outcome of the War of Independence.

And worst of all, the imams and mosques, the educational system and government controlled media are all harnessed and used to promote and incite hatred. Using images as gruesome as, and sometimes even worse than Nazi propaganda, young people and future generations are being taught that Jews and Israelis are not human, and that it is natural to hate, despise and therefore to annihilate and kill them.

Most nations have one enemy, on one front. Israel is blessed with Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza, who do not attempt to conceal their desire to destroy Israel and daily shell Israel with kassam rockets. In the north, Hezbollah is armed to the teeth, under the watchful eye of the United Nations. Lebanon has become a puppet of Iran and Syria and a launching ground for missiles aimed at Israel's northern population centers. In the West Bank, our partner, the Palestinian Authority still celebrates Arab suicide bombers as heroes. Many of Israel's Arab citizens identify with the plight of the Palestinians. Moving beyond its immediate borders, Iran funds all of these terrorist organizations and is working night and day to obtain nuclear weaponry capability. Libya uses its seat on the Security Council to condemn Israel with vile comments. Syria, Yemen and the other Arab and Moslem nations maintain a constant state of hostility and sponsor numerous efforts on many fronts against Israel.

How unfortunate that the Arab nations look upon Israel as an interlocutor they must destroy, and fail to recognize the hand of friendship extended repeatedly and expressed in the Declaration of Independence. How sad that they keep their citizens captive by using various ploys to lead them to believe that they can extricate the Jews from their homeland. How tragic that they keep them in refugee camps instead of settling and absorbing them as Israel did with the millions of refugees and homeless who arrived penniless from Europe, Arab lands, the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia and elsewhere around the world. Imagine the good that could be done if all that energy, coupled with their oil resources were harnessed to accomplish productive and positive things in partnership with Israel, instead of trying to tear it down.

Not only does Israel face actual as well as existential threats to its existence every day, it must still justify its existence and *raison d'être*.

Can you guess what Israel has in common with Syria, Algeria, the republics of the Former Soviet Union, Cambodia, Croatia, Indonesia, Kuwait, Libya, Malaysia, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Tanzania, the United Arab Emirates, and Viet Nam? Since World War II all of these, as well as about 70 other nations have either declared or been granted their independence. Yet none of them is subjected to the ongoing critique that Israel faces.

If Israel's neighbors will not allow it to live in peace, then at least the other nations of the world should allow it to defend itself. If they do not choose to support Israel in its struggle with those who seek its destruction, then they can at least refrain from supplying, enabling, encouraging, supporting and trading with those who attack it.

Israel's detractors are not just the Arab and Muslim nations. Sadly there are even many Jews and Israelis who accept the negative portrayals of Israel. How ironic that progressives who believe in women's rights, gay rights, the rights to a fair trial and to appeal, freedom of speech and conscience, judicial checks on parliamentary authority all embrace those who fail to practice these rights, and do not realize that these all exist in Israel and nowhere else in the Middle East.

Too easily Israel's critics buy into blaming Israel for the failure of the Palestinians to do what Israel has done. Much of their condition is caused by their inherent tendency to blame others, primarily Israel for their plight. As Faoud Ajami wrote last week in the U.S. News and World Report, "On a barren, small piece of land, the Zionists built a durable state. It was military but not militaristic. It took in waves of refugees and refashioned them into citizens. It had room for faith but remained a secular enterprise. Under conditions of a long siege, it maintained a deep and abiding democratic ethos. The Arabs could have learned from this experiment, but they drew back in horror." He cites the inability of the Palestinians to accept responsibility for their situation as the true reason for their failure to build a nation and achieve their goals.

With no natural resources, no oil reserves, isolated in its region, on a tiny sliver of land, Israel has the highest gross domestic product in the region, the most literate population in the Middle East, the most startup companies, after the US and England, the most listings of any foreign nation on the NASDAQ - I could go on, but many of you know the amazing accomplishments, and share the pride we all feel. As I heard Ambassador Sallai Merridor say at a Memorial Day ceremony, quoting Ariel Sharon, "All that we built, we did with one hand, for the other hand always had to hold arms to defend ourselves."

The rebirth of the Jewish state, against tremendous odds, is perhaps the greatest victory of the human spirit over adversity in the history of the world.

But Israel's greatest accomplishment is not its economic achievements, nor its amazing advances in medicine, science or technology. Neither is its literary or cultural diversity, its thriving democracy, free press and system of courts and justice, as well as the institutions and bureaucracy created to administer all this is its greatest accomplishment. I would say that its most significant achievement is that in spite of everything, it is a people that does not hate. It has managed to create a society that while justifiably skeptical about the possibility of peace with such unrelentingly hostile neighbors, still dares to hope and to dream. This spirit is what is so precious. It is a nation that defies the prevailing culture and attitude of the region where it resides. For Israel, above all, embraces and celebrates life! Happy Birthday.

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